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ABSTRACT

Debate in English is growing in popularity in Japan as a way of learning the English language and the Western way of thinking. English Speaking Societies that sponsor debate activities are found at many Japanese colleges and are popular since many students believe that knowing English will provide them with better job opportunities. The format for two-person debates consists of constructive speeches, rebuttals, and cross-examination followed by summary speeches. Japanese debaters rely heavily on English newspapers for their sources of information and are generally not as specific in argumentation as Americans, and what is left unsaid can be as crucial to their arguments as what is said. (IJ)

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Debating in Japan

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It was a privilege for me to go to Japan with two American debaters on an exchange from May 15 through July 5, 1978. Much to my surprise and pleasure, I discovered that the United States is not the only country where debate plays a vital role in the educational process of many students. For many years, Japan has had a developing interest in forensic education as well.

In 1873, Fukuzawa Yukichi, the founder of Keio University in Tokyo, established the first training progran in debate in Japan. He urged that speech be studied as a way for people to learn more about communicating ideas. He created the first known oratorical society in Japan and debate training was one of the activities of that society. Early debates were in Japanese, but, by 1950, debating was performed in English. Today, English language forensic contests are popular and growing. But why is there such a contemporary interest in speech communication, particularly debate?

The Japanese are eager to learn about the West, largely because they recognize they are now a world power whose closest friends are Western countries. This does not mean they want to become Westernized. In fact, they want to preserve as much of their own culture as possible. Nevertheless, they believe that it is vital that they learn Western languages and thought. It is this keen desire which makes debate an attractive learning tool. Not only can they learn English, but they can also learn about Western logic. They do not debate in Japanese because they believe their language is too emotional and abstract. It is probably not only their language, but also their life style which makes hard bargaining, formal contracts, and systematic methods for problem-solving alien to them.

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The rationale for debating in English were stated quite explicitly in a speech given to students by Michihiro Matsumoto, a well-known promoter of forensic activity in Japan, when he said: "First, with the advent of the age of information overload, people have become aware of the necessity to develop analytical and critical ability. Second, the value systems are diversifying, calling for the need for 'logic' as a neutral or non-emotional means to see things in perspective - without being swayed by any ideological influences. Third, the domestic problems calling for decision making have become too complex to be solved only by non-confrontational methods inherent in the traditional culture of Japan. ... Time has come for Japan to shift gears from the traditional pattern of keep-them-guessing ... communication to the more sophisticated means of persuasion and two-way communication - debate. By debate, I mean an intellectual (not emotional) debate that 'communicates' cross-culturally mind-to-mind as well as heart-to-heart." Thus Japanese college students participate in debate as a way of learning Western thought, language, and behavior.

Of course, debate is only one means of accomplishing this objective. All Japanese junior and senior high school students learn how to write and read English, although few of them learn how to speak it. It is only when they enter college that they usually learn how to speak English. For instance, one university we visited, the freshmen begin with conversation drill first and oratorical declamations later. In the latter category, each student memorizes and interprets aloud in a contest situation the Martin Luther King "I Have A Dream" speech. After this initial effort in learning to speak English, the students will move on to construct and deliver their own orations, to participate in small group discussion contests, to present one-act plays, and/or to debate.

All of these activities are generated in groups usually called English Speaking Societies and nearly all of their work is presented in contests before judges who can evaluate their English. Anywhere from fifty to one hundred students may belong to one ESS group and such groups are found at approximately 150 Japanese institutions of higher education.

The dedication to forensics by ESS members is, to say the least, incredible. Several students actually drop out of classes partially or fully, thereby extending their undergraduate career beyond four years, to work in their ESS group. Most ESS groups meet daily, often during lunch hours or after school in the early evening. General meetings are well organized and friendly. Rarely is a faculty member present; these are mostly student-operated organizations. Within a typical ESS group are "circles," or interest groups, such as debate, discussion, speech, drama, and guide service. All of the activity is extra-curricular, not co-curricular, in nature.

Every ESS group has a slate of officers. They are always excellent in their English, personable, and forceful. In all cases I know of, the presidents of ESS groups are males, so typical of the attitude toward women in Japanese society. Each circle usually has a "chief" and there are miscellaneous officers such as a vice-president, secretary, treasurer, negotiator of debates, etc. Officers are generally upper-classmen and they wield an enormous amount of power over the under-classmen. The latter group are ordered to prepare food, translate and type evidence, clean up rooms after meetings, and so forth. They listen patiently and follow the orders without challenging the authority of the upper-classmen. In fact, seniors are called "human" gods while the freshmen are called "slaves" or "monkeys." Such an atmosphere pervades each ESS.

ESS groups not only meet throughout the school year, but also during summer vacations. In the summer, camps are held where only English is spoken and where training in forensic events is provided. The camps last from four to ten days. Students pay their own way at a cost of about 4000 to 5000 yen a day. Rarely is there any kind of faculty guidance, especially since a person called a "forensic coach" is virtually unknown throughout Japan.

The forensic fervor found throughout Japanese ESS groups carries over to their commitments to tournaments as well. Tournaments are generally arranged by student committees. The students come from various universities within a region and these

universities form leagues. In previous years, each league chose its own topic, but the Japan English Forensic Association is hopefully moving in the direction of persuading all leagues to use a single semester proposition.

A brief examination of the Japanese educational system in some way explains this devotion to speech communication and forensics. Tests are taken very seriously in Japan. They may determine what kindergarten, what elementary school, what junior high school, what high school, and what college a student will attend. At a very early age, mothers provide as much tutoring for their children as possible so the child will be able to go to the best possible school. After all, the higher quality school means a higher quality job later in life. What college one attends virtually fixes in place the kind of job one has. And there is very little movement from job to job. The Japanese call their job system "lifetime employment." This rigid testing and placement system, combined with the fact that it is very difficult to change majors or colleges, means that college education is not taken very seriously by most students. Once they have been accepted at a particular institution, they are finished with their heavy doses of tests and can now relax.

Furthermore, passing courses in Japanese universities is a relatively easy matter. It is almost impossible to fail anything. The courses are dull and the instructors have very little contact with their students. The attitude of the students then is to look for something meaningful to do during their undergraduate years. Of course, mastering English is very attractive because the Japanese believe they must learn it in order to obtain attractive jobs later. Some attend private English training institutes; some join an ESS; many do both.

Colleges in Japan are also a place to learn about society. It is believed that freshmen learn from sophomores, sophomores learn from juniors, etc. This makes organizations attractive because they are places where students can learn from other students older than them. The result is that English Speaking Societies and forensics offer to the college student of Japan a life which is more informative, more fun, and more rewarding than being just a college student attending classes.

It is into this system of thinking and activity that Dan Bessesen (Colorado State University), Rob Meadow (Dartmouth College), and I found ourselves on the CIDD tour a year and a half ago. We had the pleasure of either debating students in ESS groups or judging their competitive activities. The Americans on this CIDD tour participated in twenty-nine debate matches in all parts of Japan. All of our debates were on the proposition, Resolved: That Japan should remove restrictions on imported commodities. (As it developed, this was an extremely timely resolution since the value of the yen was making our American dollars nearly worthless during the visit!)

The format used for most of the two-person debates consisted of eight-minute constructive speeches, four-minute rebuttals, and three-minute cross-examination periods between each constructive speech. On occasion, we would become involved in a five-person format where each team had an initial ten-minute constructive speech followed by eight minutes of cross-examination by each team. At the end of sixteen minutes of cross-examination, there were summary speeches of five minutes each. It was a most unusual format which was very difficult to follow and to flow. Nevertheless, the Japanese believe it is a good format for beginners since it helps to build confidence in themselves.

Case analysis in Japan is very similar across all squads. For instance, a very common case structure is to present a very lengthy introduction which includes some historical background and a definition of terms. Then there might be two contentions (e.g., (1) Japanese consumers are dissatisfied with the high prices of beef in Japan and (2) high prices are caused by the adjustment fee, the quota system, and the distribution system). Then, in the second affirmative speech, a brief plan is presented which adjusts these causes of high beef prices in some way. The plan is then said to yield several advantages, some of which are nothing more than plan-meet-need arguments and some of which are unique (e.g., America will be a happier trading partner). The negative will typically argue significance, inherency, and repercussions (disadvantages), but will spend little time on solvency matters. There is also no clear

pattern of organization or division of labor among speakers in most Japanese negative attacks.

Japanese debaters rely very heavily on newspapers for their sources of information. Some of these are English papers (Asahi Evening News, Japan Times, and Mainici Daily News) and other materials are translated from Japanese sources. On occasion, the translation will be phrased to make the evidence seem a little stronger than it actually is! This is why we encouraged them to use English sources as often as possible, although most students found they could translate from Japanese into English more quickly than reading documents already written in the English language. Their information is placed on note cards and most often filed in small ring-binder books which are arranged topically. Each Japanese debater has approximately one hundred to five hundred cards in his/her possession.

One of the things which amazed us was the large number of women debating in Japan. This was surprising because Japan is far from being a bastion of womens' liberation. We suspected that some of the women who debated would eventually be leaders in some future feminist movement in Japan, but, for most of them, it was simply a means of gaining poise in a foreign language which would make them more attractive marriage prospects for some potentially influential Japanese male.

The audiences ranged from only a half a dozen students to nearly four hundred. Most of the audiences were quite large, much to our amazement and satisfaction. The audiences consisted largely of undergraduate students although faculty and the general public interested in the topic were sprinkled throughout the observers.

Although most of the debates consisted of a Japanese team against Bessesen and Meadow, there were some variations. A few times Bessesen and Meadow debated against each other in a two-person match and I would offer a critique. A few times Bessesen and Meadow would join forces with Japanese partners and debate against each other. And a few times yours truly would enter the debates finding a partner and facing off against Bessesen and Meadow. We were never quite sure what the arrangements would be

at each school, but we remained flexible and no problems resulted. In fact, the diversity of arrangements was a joy for us.

If there was any problem at all in the debates, it was a most interesting cultural phenomenon. Japanese debaters are generally not as specific in argumentation as Americans. What is left unsaid can often be as crucial in their arguments as what is said. Therefore, what we often perceived as a lack of clash, they often perceived as excellent clash. Some theorize that the homogeneous Japanese people can communicate a great deal by "hara-gue" or stomach communication. This telepathic exchange of messages means that, in debate, lots of inferences are assumed and never directly communicated. So, when a Japanese debater says that to end tariffs on some commodities would bring world peace, our debaters were baffled. The chain of causal connections was seldom clearly established by the Japanese. They too were puzzled by our insisting that they verbalize this chain of connections. Some communication breakdowns occurred in the debates as a result of "hara-gue," but these breakdowns illustrated quite nicely the differences in cultures which, after all, was an important part of the tour.

The quality of the debates was excellent. The Japanese speak fluent English and have a generally good understanding of fundamental debate theory although they were admittedly confused by all the jargon found in most debate textbooks. We frequently received questions such as, "But how do I use a Toulmin model in the first affirmative?" Nevertheless, their debating skills are quite good in all respects except organization.

The Japanese do make use of charts while speaking. These charts are usually designed for the purpose of clarifying supporting material in their speeches. At times, these elaborate visual aids became overly cumbersome. They also began debates with self-introductions, some of which provided a rare touch of humor in the debate setting. Humor is rare, I think, because there is not enough language capability to say something which would evoke laughter in a debate. Also, to say something humorous in

such a formal exercise can sometimes be interpreted as rudeness. Debate to the Japanese student is a very serious matter.

Not only were we in debates, but we also judged debates. Some we judged as the Japanese were having intramural matches among themselves. But, we also had the pleasure and honor of serving as guest judges at two of their most prestigious tournaments. Japanese debating is organized into leagues. Our first assignment was to judge at the Tokyo Intercollegiate Debate League (TIDL). Our second assignment was to judge at the East-West Debate Tournament (KIDL-TIDL) which is probably their equivalent of our National Debate Tournament in America.

At a debate tournament in Japan, teams drew straws to find out who their competition would be and which side of the resolution they would debate. There were three judges in each round. After one loss, a team was eliminated from competition. There were large audiences for each debate because each school was supported by non-debating club members. These members actually served as cheer leaders before and after each match or round of debate. Each judge had an assistant who escorted the judge to the room, added speaker points, and served refreshments. The judges were the last people to enter the room where the debates took place. When the judges entered, the audience rose and applauded. A student chairman and one or two timekeepers with elaborate timekeeping equipment were also present. After the debate, one or more of the judges presented comments to the debaters and audience. They were then escorted out of the room and taken to a private chamber where ballots were completed. Sometimes the judges reached their decisions independently; other times there were judge conferences where the "chief judge" seemed to carry more weight. The ballot was very long and complicated, but is probably helpful to lay judges who do not know how to evaluate competitive argument. (It apparently is very difficult to get a pool of qualified judges for the debate events.) The debates were very serious affairs and rather formal. The students dressed well and the judges were identified by the colorful ribbons they wear. Each speaker was carefully introduced by the

chairman. Unfortunately, there was virtually no judge-debater contact during the tournament. Nevertheless, the tournament atmosphere was very much like the exciting climate created by such similar events in the United States.

Two types of instructional situations also emerged during the tour. The first consisted of informal lecture-discussions, often called "table talks." These would consist of small groups listening to yours truly or one of the American debaters who would spend a few moments offering comments after which the Japanese students would pose questions and offer comments. All three of us found these settings to be friendly, productive, and clearly one of the highlights of our tour. These sessions occurred so frequently that we lost an actual count of them.

The second type of instructional situation consisted of formal lectures by me. I gave twenty-one lectures in various settings, each lecture lasting from one to two hours. Most of the lectures dealt with some perspective on argumentation and debate, although some of the topics to which I was assigned were much broader. In the latter group of topics, I lectured on "The Role of Speech Communication in American Society," "The History of Forensics in American Education," and "A History of Rhetorical Theory."

One of the problems I had with the lectures was to get audience feedback. The Japanese students seem almost forbidden from asking questions in classroom settings. The lecturer is viewed as a person with something just short of "almighty power." Therefore, questioning a lecturer is seen by some to be another display of rudeness. Therefore, when I asked for questions, I almost always got no response at all. At first, this was very frustrating. Therefore, I began planting a few questions and/or would meet with small groups afterwards and I found the students certainly did have questions but, out of habit, they would not ask them during large lecture sessions.

In conclusion, the debates we held, the debates we judged, the lectures we gave, and the discussions we had with Japanese students were extremely valuable and exciting for both parties. There is no question in my mind that the SCA-CIDD should give utmost priority to our exchange debate program with Japan, not only because their style

of debate is so much like that in America, but because they are so eager to learn about speech communication and argument and we, as Americans, have so much to learn about the Far East. Certainly this tour goes far in attaining the objectives of the CIDD program by (1) broadening the scope of international, educational, and cultural exchanges by providing a channel for the exchange of ideas and attitudes among students and young people in America and throughout the world, (2) making possible informal meetings among students, college and university personnel, and the general citizens of the participating countries, (3) facilitating the exchange of information and ideas about the educational systems of the countries involved, and (4) reinforcing the importance of dialogue as a preferred means for resolving international/intercultural differences. It has therefore been the purpose of this paper to show how both the structured and unstructured exchanges on significant issues during the U.S. debate tour of Japan did much to increase international understanding.